

WasteDataFlow (WDF) User Group for England – minutes of meeting on 8th October 2020

1. Introductions

The User Group meeting was hosted online given the current wider circumstances relating to Covid-19 and the associated local lockdowns. This differs from previous meetings which were held face-to-face.

The introduction outlined the planned schedule for the day, including a brief outline on how attendees can contribute to the meeting through providing feedback and general comments.

2. Actions points from the last meeting

Action point / owner	Progress
Action 1 (Sep 19) – Defra to review the findings from the WRAP study, once carried out, and consider potential standard factors for process loss to present at the next user group meeting.	Findings from research are indicative – value of extending research currently being assessed.
Action 2 (Sep 19) – Defra to consider adding the ability to filter the Qu100 tree to show only nodes without tonnages and/or to sort the Qu100 tree in other ways such as alphabetically or by site type.	Changes made: ability to filter by with or without tonnages; ability to search by key word.
Action 3 (Sep 19) – Defra to consider adding more modern search functionalities to the facility selection list and/or reviewing the base data provided by the EA.	No progress on base data review due to resource issues. Updates to search facilities to be considered.

<p>Action 4 (Sep 19) – Defra to reinforce the existing fly-tipping module guidance.</p> <p>Action 5 (Sep 19) – Defra to consider conducting an exercise with LAs to gather a more comprehensive understanding of how fly-tipping is reported and how LAs handle risks such as double-counting.</p>	<p>Guidance updated in October 2019.</p> <p>Additional questions added to front end of Fly-tipping Module. Results of this will be taken into account with publication of next FTM stats.</p>
<p>Action 6 (Sep 19) – Defra to consider amending 'Facility Address' to 'Facility Name and Address' on the Qu100 tree.</p>	<p>Completed (new data entry box "Facility operator", which gets combined with "Facility address").</p>
<p>Action 7 (Sep 19) – Defra and Jacobs to agree guidance on the use of the recycling report to derive the WfH recycling measure.</p>	<p>Put on hold due to other development work during winter 2019/20.</p>
<p>Action 8 (Sep 19) – Waste data management system – survey</p> <p>Project leaders /Jacobs/Defra to determine how the survey will be distributed and then action it.</p>	<p>On hold pending Covid-19, news on Waste Tracking Service (WTS) aims etc. Item on agenda for discussion at this meeting.</p>
<p>Action 9 (Sep 19) – Defra to send out invitations to join the WTS user panel following official announcement of phase 2 of the project.</p>	<p>Completed.</p>

3. Update from Defra Waste Stats Team

Wastedataflow Contract

Defra provided an update on the WDF contract, which since the last meeting has been extended until 2022. It is likely there will be a need to extend the contract beyond this date as although work on the Waste tracking is progressing, rollout of the system is thought to be 1-2 years away.

Office for Statistics regulation review of Local Authority waste statistics

Defra explained that the Office for Statistics Regulations (OSR) has recently undertaken an assessment of the Local authority waste statistics and WDF for each of the 4 UK countries. The review covered: content and commentary of the Statistical notices, and quality of the data gathered through the WDF system and engagement with data users. The OSR had now confirmed that the stats produced for England, Wales and N Ireland would retain their "National statistics" status, while Scotland would continue to be "Official statistics". The reporting letter which is published by OSR can be found here:-

https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Compliance_check_local_authority_collected_waste_management_statistics-1.pdf

The reporting letter covers the strengths of the Stats, their production and data gathering and also areas for improvement. The OSR highlighted the following strengths:-

- WDF provides a standardised form for reporting generating a robust data series.
- Stats notice is well structured, impartial and has moved forward with new content over recent issues.
- All countries maintain strong and constructive links with LAs through the user group meetings.
- Good collaboration between countries.
- Stats notice Waste from Household recycling rate measures allow cross-UK country comparison.
- Development of the Waste tracking system.

Defra spoke about several of the areas for improvement:-

- a) More engagement with data users and that more feedback should be sought from them. Defra said that while they currently get plenty of feedback through the User group from LAs as users of WDF they would appreciate feedback on how LA's use the statistics and datasets / data gathered through WDF.
- b) Better explanation in the stats publications of what counts as recycling, how overall recycling measures are calculated, and how these differ across each of the UK countries.
- c) Defra and other countries should explore the development of a Carbon metric – like SEPA - measuring the whole life carbon impact of waste.
- d) A process map / flow diagram which shows the data reporting process through WDF, starting with data collation by local authorities (LAs) through to data publication by Defra. To achieve this recommendation, Defra said that they would need assistance from a few LA's on how they go about data collection and reporting. This would primarily focus on how the data is gathered and reviewed prior to being entered in WDF, how suspected data irregularities are resolved, and how validation queries are addressed. Understanding LA and Waste contractor relationship would also be helpful in this work which is ultimately around quality assurance of the data and statistics.

A question was raised by an attendee with Defra on whether the implementations of the OSR recommendations was required or whether they could simply be acknowledged as a potential development item in the future?

Defra responded by saying that the recommendations would need to be addressed/ taken on board if National Statistics status were to be maintained. However they would need to be implemented on a timescale that accounted for resource availability and in line with future statistical releases. Consultations with relevant organisations would also need to be considered when preparing this timescale.

Defra will have further meetings with the OSR and likely be required to outline a work programme to address recommendations and issues raised.

Action 1 - Defra to seek feedback on LAs use of data via Newsletter.

Action 2 - Defra to seek assistance from a few user group members to learn about data gathering and QA process at LA level.

4. WDF Reporting – feedback and discussion

Defra provided an update on WDF reporting given the current wider circumstances relating to Covid-19. Defra's first point to raise was an acknowledgement that these circumstances have placed a significant burden on LAs and that their continued support in completing WDF submissions was much appreciated. The introduction of lockdown measures so close to the Quarter 4 WDF submission deadline, and the associated change in working patterns for most, meant that a more pragmatic approach had been adopted by Defra around reporting deadlines.

Defra said that nearly all LAs had now completed their 2019/20 submissions for both WDF and the Fly-Tipping Module (FTM), with only a very small number of returns yet to be completed. However these reporting delays meant that usual data QA and stats notice publishing were now well behind schedule. Increased demand for statistics and analysis following the introduction of lockdown measures, had likely impacted all those in attendance. For Defra specifically, this, alongside the other impacts of Covid-19, continued to place pressure on available resource, and together with reporting delays publication of the annual statistical releases normally in November or December would now be delayed.

The provisional publication dates for both the Fly tipping and Local Authority waste and recycling statistics has now been provisionally announced as January or February 2021.

In order to ease reporting during this ongoing situation, the pragmatic approach to reporting delays had been extended to Quarter 1 data. Also temporary changes had been made to validation query thresholds based around results from the ADEPT survey of LAs. Results from this survey can be found here: <https://www.adeptnet.org.uk/covid-19-waste-survey-results>. Defra hoped that these changes had helped reduce validation queries raised due to large swings in waste stream tonnages caused by lockdown conditions.

The Adept survey was a voluntary survey of LAs conducted between March and September 2020 by ADEPT with assistance from Defra statisticians to analyse the results. Its purpose was to inform LAs and central Government on difficulties / changes to collection schemes and waste management provisions (commercial waste services, street sweepings, HWRC / CA sites etc.), and changes in waste volumes.

The validation query thresholds for FTM returns haven't been adjusted and remain the same.

Defra asked those attending the meeting around whether they would like to provide any feedback around any difficulties in gathering data or impact on the quality of their data due to Covid-19?

LAs said that gathering data from smaller organisations was more difficult, especially those that collect textiles, as they had either stopped collections during the lockdown or the individuals who provided statistics weren't working as normal. It was also stated that some LAs had requested their contractors provide data on a more regular basis (sometimes daily) in order to better understand their local circumstances, including draft data being provided.

Developments to Wastedataflow

Jacobs provided an update on development items that have been introduced since the last User Group meeting in September 2019, of which the majority were implemented in early 2020 so should now be familiar to those attending the meeting.

Jacobs explained that the function that allowed final destination information to be entered 'manually', via the new outputs button, had been removed, with the only option now being the 'Auto FD' button. The change had been implemented to prevent differences between the final destination node and the associated facility, while also increasing awareness of this button as this is quicker than manually creating the final destination node.

A further update had been made which restricted the materials types listed for a site based on what had been entered at a preceding facility, for example removing organic waste options for clean MRFs. This change was made to prevent waste materials varying between facilities in the same section (branch) of Qu100 by reducing the options available.

An indicative MRF rejection rate is now shown for each MRF in Qu100, which helps highlight rates outside a given range. This addition was made to allow LAs to more easily identify where tonnages may have been entered incorrectly or where further investigations was required.

The household and non-household ratios are now shown under the tonnages entered in Qu100, which should help identify where these fields are incomplete or incorrect.

The last change in Qu100 related to the 'other/exempt' field and the addition of the 'Facility Operator' field, within which should be listed the name of the company who operates the site receiving waste.

LAs provided feedback on these development items, commenting that the MRF reject rates and the auto FD features in particular were useful in improving Qu100 data entry and data quality.

Developments to the Fly tipping module

A new question has been added to the front end of the fly tipping module. The question asks LAs to confirm whether the information being entered relates to all relevant incidents and actions covering both public reported and those incidents that are pro-actively cleared by their own and contractors' crews, or just one of those sources.

This question resulted from an understanding that LAs weren't reporting all incidents and / or actions since one of the sources wasn't available to them. The new question will allow for a greater understanding of this.

Training

Jacobs provided an update on the training sessions offered for all users, which focuses on five different aspects – Qu100, Qu100 validation report, reports, new users, and the FTM. If any attendees have any feedback which may improve attendance, then this would be well received and should be sent via the WDF helpdesk.

Questions from LAs

One LA raised a query relating to the XML upload function, which they use but have experienced technical issues with, and whether other LAs have experienced similar? Most attending LAs commented that they don't use the XML upload, but a small number of attendees did use the uploader for questions other than Qu100.

Jacobs commented that they were aware of the issues reported by the LA and were investigating them.

5. Policy updates

Municipal recycling rate measure – Reprocessor rejects study

Defra gave an overview of their ongoing work around the infrastructure of reprocessor and reject rates. A study looking at reprocessor infrastructure in England and reject rates was conducted by WRAP at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020. The report from this study will not be published due to the small number of responses received and the sensitive nature of the results. Due to the small sample sizes achieved for the various sectors, the results around reject rates are indicative. Defra is currently considering the value of extending this work and how the results may be used in the development of municipal waste measures.

When reporting data on dry recyclates through WDF currently the last point of reporting is at a reprocessor. Under the incoming Circular Economy Package, this will be revised to the point where the material is recycled, so reprocessor rejects would be included in recycling rate calculations.

Defra Consultation – Waste management plan for England

Defra then stated that the Waste Management Plan for England was published earlier this year and there is a consultation associated with this which closed on the 15th October 2020.

Work closely relates to other published items such as the Clean Growth Strategy and the 25 Year Environment Plan.

Environment bill - Progress

The Environment Bill that was published last summer went to committee stage earlier this year and, at present, remains there until further notice [Parliament recently announced Committee stages for the Bill would recommence on 3 November]. In relation to consistency, clause 54 of the Bill states that waste collectors (including LAs) must collect 'recyclable waste streams' – plastics, metals, glass, paper & card, food waste and garden waste – separately. This is required except where it is technically, environmentally or economical not practicable (TEEP). Where this is the case a TEEP assessment should be prepared. The same criteria would also apply for commercial waste collections (excluding garden waste).

There are discussions around the types of materials to be included within each waste stream, such as the inclusion of plastic films within the plastics category. These discussions are being made with industry and LAs, with consideration also given to Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and Deposit Return Schemes (DRS).

In relation to TEEP, statutory guidance will be issued which clarifies the criteria for applying TEEP exceptions. There would also be consultation on possible exemptions where it is anticipated that materials can be collected together where there is a limited impact on material quality, such as metals collected alongside plastics. The transposition of the EU Circular Economy Package now required that plastics, metal, paper and glass separately collected for recycling or reuse should not be sent for landfill or incineration unless they have been through treatment and landfill/incineration represented the best environmental outcome in accordance with the waste hierarchy.

There is also a consultation in relation to EPR, that focuses on full net cost recovery of material placed on the market, and on the implementation of a DRS. The timescale for the introduction of these would be 2023, so consideration is being given to existing contractual agreements and the potential need for these to be reviewed to account for these changes.

Waste tracking system

Defra went on to provide an update on the WTS, which is a digital system which aims to record, check and track all waste movements through the waste management chain, leading to more effective waste regulations and policy. The WTS will combine the current separate waste data reporting systems into a single portal.

Currently in Phase 2, there are various aspects of the system that are currently being developed. For example, considerations are currently being given to how the WTS system will handle data entry, with the aim being to ensure easy data enter to the system and to be able to link this submitted data across the separate parties involved in a 'transaction'. Data storage and processing is also an area of consideration, such as how the data will be formatted, the data fields and how it will be mapped.

Phase 2 will conclude in mid-October 2020.

The next stage of development would likely involve conducting pilots of the system for specific applications, building on the broader technical work undertaken in phase 2. There are various candidate applications; one of these could include a focus on municipal waste data and so assistance maybe requested in relation to this from English LAs.

Defra underlined the value for LA's to engage with WTS work and encouraged LAs to sign up to the [regular newsletter](#) and [User Panel](#) so that their views and input can be requested for the development of the WTS. This is entirely voluntary, and no minimum required input will be placed on those that sign up.

There was a recent presentation given by Defra, and the two phase 2 suppliers, Anthesis and Topolytics, on waste tracking to members of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) in June 2020. The slides are available [here](#).

6. Waste data management system survey

Iain Stevens at Devon County Council stated that the use of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets for waste data management is increasingly outdated and previous discussions with software solution companies identified costly and protracted solutions. Historic systems are also becoming less relevant given the introduction of the Waste Tracking Service and potential implications for local authorities.

During a prior WDF UG meeting the group considered the merits of a consortium approach to procuring a software solution with the aim of achieving lower costs for individual authorities but this was difficult to coordinate nationally and unlikely that any single authority would volunteer to oversee the procurement process.

The group therefore agreed that baseline survey establishing how English LAs currently manage data would provide a useful insight for future work and this will be progressed.'

One LA who was part of the WTS group, commented that a question had been asked through that forum which asked for responders to confirm the type of software used to prepare waste statistics. Defra confirmed that this data was held by them, so could be analysed further to provide information on the systems used by individual responders.

Support was voiced for proceeding with the survey, albeit with a rework to the questions, and this would help further inform work around WTS and data interface with LAs.

Action point 3 - Updated list of questions to be agreed with Defra and circulated via WDF newsletter.

7. WDF Reports

Defra asked attendees for feedback on the reports available through WDF, specially the recycling and 'Raw data plus' reports. This followed on from a request raised at the last User Group meeting. Defra acknowledged pressures on resources due to Covid meant that it was unlikely that attendees would have been able to review the reports in depth.

LAs confirmed that the new reports were useful, but confirmed that other pressures meant that they couldn't fully review the reports as they otherwise would have been able to.

8. Any other business

An LA raised a question regarding the frequency of updates made to the Facilities selection list, as they had found an increasing number of facilities that weren't available while completing the last submissions. Defra confirmed that the selection list was managed and updated by the EA, with an action from the last meeting being that EA and Defra would look at implementing more frequent updates. Due to the wider circumstances however, and the associated impact on resources, this had not yet been possible.

Jacobs commented that there is guidance on requesting updates for the selection list available via the [Guidance](#) on the WDF website.

Action point 4 Defra to check on procedures for updates.

Questions from LA's

A further question was raised by an LA on whether the Performance Indicator report would be updated to include the "waste from households" recycling calculation? Defra said this had been considered but there weren't any current plans to update the PI report to include this figure. There was a concern that the usefulness of doing this might be short lived given work to move to the new "municipal recycling rates". For those who wanted to see it the WFH recycling rate can be calculated at LA level from the Recycling report, though it was acknowledged that some familiarity with this report would be needed in order to calculate the figure.

The final question raised by an LA related to reporting material exported abroad after being received by a MRF, as there are challenges with gathering this information. Specifically, whether the WTS will make it easier to gather this information? Defra stated that the aim of WTS was to better link up different sources of information and that this would hopefully assist with the gathering of this information.

9. Timing of next meeting and any requests for agenda items for the next meeting

The timing of the next meeting is currently anticipated to be in Spring 2021, following the publication of the annual statistics.

Ideas for agenda items are welcome and should be sent for consideration via the WDF helpdesk.

Thanks to all those who attended.

Attendees:

Name	Organisation
Claire Norman	Ashford Borough Council

Amanda Hulse	Barnsley MBC
Kristopher Elsey	Barnsley MBC
Jennie Beckett	Bexley LB
Michael Richards	Cambridgeshire County Council
Chris Dove	Cumbria County Council
Adele Storr	Defra
Alex Clothier (Chair)	Defra
Katherine Merrett	Defra
Lindsay Holmes	Defra
Lorraine May	Defra
Robert Vaughan	Defra
Iain Stevens	Devon County Council
Gemma Rudgard	Dover District Council
Andy Mayes	East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Mike Tregent	Environment Agency
Laura Hemingway	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Richard Booth	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Janine Stevens-Hoare	Hampshire County Council
Steven Drabble	Harrogate Borough Council
Anne McDonald	Jacobs
Julian Fox	Jacobs
Liz Glynn	Jacobs
Robert Andrew	Jacobs
Tim Knowles	Jacobs
Lisa Carberry	Lambeth LB
Ian Lancaster	Lancashire County Council
Luke Crown	Leicester City Council
Phil Hadfield	Newark and Sherwood District Council
Helen Dennis	Newham LB
Grace Brown	North London Waste Authority
Andrew Bean	Pendle Borough Council
Sarah Innes	Reading Borough Council
Fiona Gutteridge	Rochford District Council
Rebecca Piper	Suffolk County Council
Lorraine Beeks	Surrey County Council
Rob Morris	Telford and Wrekin Council
Julie Davies	Tewkesbury Borough Council
Emma Phillips	West Oxfordshire District Council
Sian Edwards	West Oxfordshire District Council